Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

28 June 2016

Mr. John Greenewald, Jr.
The Black Vault
[redacted]

Reference: F-2015-00122

Dear Mr. Greenewald:

This is a final response to your 12 October 2014 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for **"a copy of records, electronic or otherwise, pertaining to the sinking of the Russian submarine 'Kursk,' which occurred on August 12, 2000."** We processed your request in accordance with the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552, as amended, and the CIA Information Act, 50 U.S.C. § 3141, as amended. Our processing included a search for records as described in our 14 November 2014 acceptance letter.

We completed a thorough search for records responsive to your request and located the enclosed document, consisting of 13 pages, which we can release in segregable form with deletions made on the basis of FOIA exemptions (b)(1) and (b)(3). A copy of the document and an explanation of exemptions are enclosed. Additional material must be denied in its entirety on the basis of FOIA exemptions (b)(1) and (b)(3). Exemption (b)(3) pertains to information exempt from disclosure by statute. The relevant statutes are Section 6 of the Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, as amended, and Section 102A(i)(l) of the National Security Act of 1947, as amended. As the CIA Information and Privacy Coordinator, I am the CIA official responsible for this determination. You have the right to appeal this response to the Agency Release Panel, in my care, within 45 days from the date of this letter. Please include the basis of your appeal.

We also conducted a search of our previously released database and located the enclosed document (C00779597), consisting of two pages, which contains information that we believe to be responsive to our request.

Sincerely,

Michael Lavergne

Michael Lavergne
Information and Privacy Coordinator

Enclosures

## Explanation of Exemptions

**Freedom of Information Act:**

(b)(1) exempts from disclosure information currently and properly classified, pursuant to an Executive Order;

(b)(2) exempts from disclosure information which pertains solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of the Agency;

(b)(3) exempts from disclosure information that another federal statute protects, provided that the other federal statute either requires that the matters be withheld, or establishes particular criteria for withholding or refers to particular types of matters to be withheld. The (b)(3) statutes upon which the CIA relies include, but are not limited to, the CIA Act of 1949;

(b)(4) exempts from disclosure trade secrets and commercial or financial information that is obtained from a person and that is privileged or confidential;

(b)(5) exempts from disclosure inter-and intra-agency memoranda or letters that would not be available by law to a party other than an agency in litigation with the agency;

(b)(6) exempts from disclosure information from personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy;

(b)(7) exempts from disclosure information compiled for law enforcement purposes to the extent that the production of the information (A) could reasonably be expected to interfere with enforcement proceedings; (B) would deprive a person of a right to a fair trial or an impartial adjudication; (C) could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy; (D) could reasonably be expected to disclose the identity of a confidential source or, in the case of information compiled by a criminal law enforcement authority in the course of a criminal investigation or by an agency conducting a lawful national security intelligence investigation, information furnished by a confidential source ; (E) would disclose techniques and procedures for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions if such disclosure could reasonably be expected to risk circumvention of the law; or (F) could reasonably be expected to endanger any individual's life or physical safety;

(b)(8) exempts from disclosure information contained in reports or related to examination, operating, or condition reports prepared by, or on behalf of, or for use of an agency responsible for regulating or supervising financial institutions; and

(b)(9) exempts from disclosure geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells.

**April 2012**

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[redacted] (b)(3)

# Intelligence Report

*Office of Russian and European Analysis*
*Office of Transnational Issues*

*7 December 2000*

## Russia's Kursk Disaster: Reactions and Implications [redacted] (b)(3)

***An internal weapons malfunction is most likely to have been the trigger for the sinking of the Russian Oscar-II nuclear submarine Kursk in the Barents Sea on 12 August.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

***Russian officials almost certainly do not yet know what sank the Kursk. Continued claims that the triggering event was a collision with a US or British submarine probably result from a combination of genuine suspicion, bureaucratic blame-shifting, and the lack of irrefutable disconfirming evidence. Conseqently, these views will be hard to dislodge.***

- ***We assess that the Russians have enough seismic and acoustic data to conclude that the Kursk was lost due to two explosions, but they lack the quantity and quality of data to point to a triggering event or to rule out the presence of another submarine in the vicinity of the Kursk. Consequently, they are unable to completely rule out a collision as the initiating event.***

- The commission charged with determining the cause of the accident—headed by Deputy Premier Klebanov—stopped short at its meeting on 8 November of claiming a collision with a US or British submarine, ***but the theory that the Kursk collided with an "underwater object" nonetheless remains "first among equals" with the Russians.***

- In a press conference after the meeting, Klebanov said the collision theory "received very serious confirmation" from expert testimony and video showing a "very serious dent" and scrapes in the rubber hull coating. ***We assess that the damage probably is the result of the second explosion or bottom impact.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

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[redacted] (b)(3)

***Government officials, in response to US officials, have refused to put a "national origin" to the "object," but this is a small fig leaf given pointed reminders by Klebanov and others that two US submarines were reported to be in the area.***

- ***Senior political officials are reluctant "officially" to charge foreign complicity—because of the lack of positive evidence and the political repercussions for Russia's relations with the US and the West more broadly. Claims by senior officials, however, already have engendered Western suspicions and distrust that could complicate and hinder future efforts to resolve bilateral problems.***

- ***Putin and his team probably hope to put the issue on hold for now, having concluded that no proof of the cause will be available until—and unless—they are able to raise the Kursk next summer.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

***Despite press charges, Russian rescue efforts were rapid and fairly robust, but ultimately doomed. Based on a note found on a recovered body from the Kursk, according to Russian media, it appears that all crewmen likely died within hours of the explosion, far too quickly for foreign assistance to have changed the outcome.***

- ***In contrast, inept public relations and obfuscation by senior officials smacked of Soviet-style secrecy and mendacity, and turned a national tragedy into a national disgrace as well.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

While the public disapproved of Putin's initial response, his support remains enviable—his job approval ratings fell only marginally to about two-thirds before recovering. ***His later, more visible, profile on the Kursk crisis and his response to subsequent disasters***—such as the Ostankino tower fire and a military air crash in Georgia—***demonstrate some learning and responsiveness to public concerns.***

- ***Press criticism—spurred in part by oligarchs attempting to turn the public relations fiasco into a political liability for Putin—reinforced Putin's desire to rein in the media.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

***The accident also has strengthened trends in military reform—pointing toward increased defense resources and further cuts in forces aimed at building a more capable military as an instrument of Russian national security policy. Military leadership changes are possible if Putin sees himself as ill-served by his commanders; some of those prominent in the crisis—such as Klebanov, Defense Minister Sergeyev, and Navy chief Kuroyedov—may have been tarnished.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

(b)(3)

This report was prepared by the Offices of Russian and European Analysis and Transnational Issues. ***Analysis is indicated in bold italics.*** Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Russia Issue Manager, OREA [redacted] (b)(3)

## Russian Claims of Foreign Complicity [redacted]

The Russian Oscar-II nuclear submarine Kursk sank to the bottom of the Barents Sea on 12 August while participating in Northern Fleet exercises. ***The accident most likely was triggered by an internal weapons malfunction*** (see inset). [redacted] (b)(3)

The commission charged with determining the cause of the accident—headed by Deputy Premier Klebanov—stopped short at its 8 November meeting of endorsing a collision with a US or British submarine as the culprit, ***but the theory that the Kursk collided with an "underwater object" nonetheless remains "first among equals" with the Russians.*** The commission's other two potential explanations remain an internal explosion and contact with a WWII mine.

- In a press conference following the commission session, Klebanov said the collision theory "received very serious confirmation" from video taken by submersibles and divers. He characterized the video as showing a "very serious dent"—a "deep hollow which must have been caused by an impact and nothing else." He also referred to streaks indicating something slid along the submarine after impact, "tearing the rubber of its outer hull."

- In a television appearance on 19 November, Klebanov said that the commission also has acoustic evidence—a mechanical tapping—from 13 August, that it is now certain could not have come from the Kursk and therefore must have come from a foreign submarine.

- Deputy Foreign Minister Mamedov and Defense Minister Sergeyev, in response to comments from US officials, refused to put a "national origin" to the "object," ***but this is a small fig leaf given pointed reminders by Klebanov and others that two US submarines were reported to be in the area.*** Russian officials also continue to maintain publicly that a British submarine, HMS Splendid, was in the area as well—a claim that London just as consistently denies. [redacted] (b)(3)

Naval commander Kuroyedov and Northern Fleet commander Popov now are the most vocal—and highly public—proponents of the theory, ***a marked change from the immediate aftermath of the accident during which they were more reticent and senior officials such as Klebanov and Defense Minister Sergeyev were more vocal.***

(b)(3)

[redacted]

- ***Senior political officials are reluctant "officially" to charge foreign complicity—because of the lack of positive evidence and the political repercussions for Russia's relations with the US and the West more broadly.*** President Putin has not publicly espoused any one theory as the most likely cause.

- Officially, the government commission's bottom line, according to Klebanov on 19 November, is that it has "a great amount of indirect evidence proving that the Russian submarine sank as a result of a collision with a foreign one." He would not disavow Kuroyedov's previous statement that there is an 80 percent chance the disaster was the result of a collision, but nonetheless stressed that without direct proof they would remain unable to claim 100 percent certainty.

- Such proof, he said, would not be available until—***and unless***—they are able to raise the Kursk next summer. [redacted] (b)(3)

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**What Do They Know?** [redacted] (b)(3)

***Russian officials almost certainly still do not know what sank the Kursk, and continued claims of a potential collision with a US submarine probably result from a combination of bureaucratic blame-shifting and genuine suspicion.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

[redacted] (b)(1)

***Against a backdrop of strong distrust of the West in Russia and a history of similar collisions—most recently in 1992 and 1993—and given the collision theory's attractiveness for personal and professional reasons in shifting the blame, Russian military and civilian leaders are likely to resist abandoning the theory.***

In this context, Russian officials—spearheaded now by the navy—have put together a body of circumstantial "evidence" to support the contention that a collision occurred.

- The video to which Klebanov and others have referred—first aired publicly on 25 October—appears to show concave damage and discoloration that superficially supports their claim. Russian naval officers watching described the apparent dent as "the point of contact

(b)(3)

and the scrape marks as they [submarines] rubbed against each other."[1] ***We assess that the damage probably is the result of the second explosion or bottom impact.***



A Russian Delta-IV SSBN after a collision with USS Grayling in the Barents Sea on 20 March 1993. [redacted] (b)(3)

- According to Russian media in early December, the Navy has cut out a hull segment containing the alleged dent, as well as one of the torpedo tubes, and brought them to the surface for further analysis.

- Russian officials also point to what they say was a sonar contact with a foreign submarine near Kursk after the explosion and a US submarine's stop in a Norwegian port, which they suspect could have been for emergency repairs. They also cite the US refusal of Moscow's official request to view the two US submarines identified in the press as monitoring the Russian naval exercises in the Barents at the time of the Kursk disaster [redacted] (b)(3)

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[1] They speculated that the collision breached the outer hull at the juncture between the first and second compartments, causing compressed air tanks just inside between the outer and pressure hulls to detonate, and ultimately leading to the massive explosion [redacted] (b)(3)

Nonetheless, defense attaché, diplomatic, and Russian media reporting indicate that many officers and engineers in the Russian naval community have dismissed collision as a cause and believe a weapons-related malfunction triggered the accident.

- A deputy chief of the Navy Main Staff, Vice Admiral Pobozhiy, told US officials in both Moscow and Washington during September that the cause of the sinking almost certainly was an internal explosion, and dismissed a collision with another submarine as "simply nonsense," which no one in the senior naval leadership believes [redacted] (b)(1) (b)(1)

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By late on 15 August, conditions reportedly had moderated enough to allow submersibles to set down on top of the escape hatch, but the Russians were unable to achieve a seal despite multiple attempts through 17 August—they say because of damage to the docking ring around the hatch. ***Opening the hatch without first establishing an airlock—as eventually occurred with Norwegian divers—would have been a death sentence for any crew left alive.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

***Whatever the case with the rescue effort, the public information campaign that surrounded it was extremely poor.***

- ***Early on 14 August, statements from Northern Fleet spokesmen clearly were intended to minimize the disaster in the face of their own uncertainty, and officials continued to be tightlipped about details until late that week.*** A Northern Fleet spokesman, for example, claimed early on 14 August that the Kursk had experienced an equipment malfunction and been forced to descend to the seabed.

- Navy chief Kuroyedov later on 14 August, however, admitted publicly that the chances for successful rescue were slim; ***and the minimal statements by naval officials from that point appear to accurately reflect what was known at the time.***

- A number of statements by Klebanov, in contrast, suffered the dual defect of being both politically motivated and, frequently, easily falsifiable. ***Saying that the entire crew died instantly with the explosion and impact with the seabed, for example, almost certainly was intended to deflect criticism for the unsuccessful rescue efforts.*** The claim was proved an exaggeration: a note retrieved from the body of a Kursk crewman on 24 October from one of the bodies indicates that 23 crewmen survived for at least a few hours in the aft compartment.[2] [redacted] (b)(3)

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[2] The note does suggest, however, that the larger point probably is correct, because the last entry reportedly was only a few hours after the explosion and well before rescue assets could have arrived. For most of the week immediately following the accident, Russian officials maintained—probably sincerely—that some crew members could have survived in aft compartments. Only later did they say that the crew had died almost instantly. [redacted] (b)(3)

(b)(3)

[redacted]



[redacted] (b)(3)

In this information near-vacuum, Russian media reported vaguely sourced claims—***many probably nothing more than rumors***—that became part of the perceived "record" of official mendacity. Government and military officials did almost no rumor control until late in the crisis, when the press was castigating them for earlier "lies"—***in part because the oligarchs who control media outlets attempted to turn the public relations fiasco into a political liability for Putin.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

***The charge that more effective rescue efforts and early acceptance of Western assistance could have saved lives almost certainly was wrong. The fate of the crewmen probably was sealed in the first minutes by the massive explosion and the failure of watertight seals that subsequently led to the flooding of the entire submarine.***

- Although Russian officials did not reject Western assistance when initially offered on 14 August, they did not accept it until two days later, saying publicly that Russia's own assets were sufficient—***which they probably judged to be true until concluding, probably by 17 August, that the docking platform (which surrounds the aft escape hatch and to which rescue submersibles would dock) was damaged beyond use by Russian or foreign submersibles.***

- Had British and Norwegian aid been offered and accepted on 13 August, their specialists would not have arrived to begin operations until 17 August, long after any survivors, it appears in retrospect, had expired.

- Finally, while security concerns were in evidence—Norwegian divers were confined to the area immediately surrounding the aft escape hatch—Moscow did allow them to train on another Oscar-II-class submarine, and to open the Kursk's hatch and videotape inside, when it was apparent that there were no survivors and the only benefit was to Russia's image domestically and internationally. [redacted] (b)(3)

**Implications of the Disaster** [redacted] (b)(3)

***Putin's initial response to the disaster***—staying in Sochi and not speaking publicly until 16 August—***was more characteristic of a bureaucrat than of an elected national leader***, as the Russian media was quick to point out. Even though half of the public viewed his performance during the crisis negatively, Russian polls indicate that the fallout for Putin personally was short lived, with a modest fall in his job approval rating to a still-enviable two-thirds before recovering. ***His belated public visibility and especially his four-hour meeting with the families probably blunted some of the criticism.***

(b)(3)

- ***The Kursk fiasco does point up the need for Putin to revamp his public relations capability to deal with fast-breaking issues, in contrast to the Kremlin's relative success in scripting the debate on longer-term issues, such as Chechnya and the effort to rein in regional leaders.***

- ***His more visible reaction to the Ostankino tower fire later in August and to a Russian military air crash in Georgia in October suggests that he has learned from the Kursk gaffe.***

- ***More important, Putin's visceral personal reaction to media attacks against him, the military, and Russia's "dignity"***—highlighted by his comments to families of the Kursk crew—***is likely to reinforce existing tendencies to strengthen government control over the media.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

***We have no evidence to date that Putin feels ill-served by his military leaders***, and he has ruled out knee-jerk firings until all the facts are in—a stance that polls indicate the public approves, if only because of the explicit contrast with Putin's predecessors. In his televised interview on the disaster on 23 August, he aggressively defended the military's performance in the rescue effort and defended Defense Minister Sergeyev personally. Sergeyev and others reciprocated, defending Putin's decision to stay in Sochi.

- ***More broadly, although many in the military probably share public disapproval of Putin's personal response to the crisis, the officer corps—like the public thus far—is likely to remain supportive of Putin.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

***The Kursk episode probably will affect Putin's decisions about military leadership over the longer term, however, and he may conclude that mistakes or lies by military chiefs require the ax to fall.*** By next April[3] at the latest, Putin will have to decide whether to extend Sergeyev's tenure for another year after the formal retirement age. ***Even before the Kursk accident, Sergeyev's image was damaged by the vitriolic debate with General Staff chief Kvashnin over military reform, and some of Sergeyev's potential successors—Klebanov and Kuroyedov—also may have been tarnished, if only in the public eye, by the Kursk episode.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

***As with the Kremlin's stance on the media, the Kursk disaster is likely to strengthen existing trends with regard to military reform and defense resources.*** Whatever

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[3] Sergeyev's 61st birthday is in April, and by Russian law he must retire unless granted a presidential extension [redacted] (b)(3)

Putin judges are the true causes of the Kursk disaster, he has chosen to highlight the cumulative impact of a decade of funding cuts for the military. His statement to the families suggests that one of the lessons he has drawn from the tragedy is that Russia no longer can afford to support the current size of the military—a point he made three times during the meeting—even with the increased resources he plans. [redacted] (b)(3)

- Putin's preference for further downsizing has been publicly confirmed by Security Council decisions to cut the armed forces from 1.2 million men to about 850,000, although many details of the plan remain contentious. [redacted] (b)(3)

On the other side of the equation, Putin and the government already had taken steps prior to the Kursk to boost military finances, and legislative leaders succeeded in gaining a small further increase. The Kremlin for now appears committed to generally holding the line to preexisting budget increases, while building sufficient flexibility into the 2001 budget to add more if revenues remain strong.

- This strategy would be consistent with Putin's claimed personal practice of limiting his promises to those he knows he can keep, and then adding more if feasible—a pattern seen already with regard to military pay increases and the 2000 defense budget. [redacted] (b)(3)

***The impact of the Kursk disaster—and the Putin administration's reaction—on Russia's relations with other countries will depend in part on the extent to which Russian officials continue to maintain that a foreign submarine caused the accident, and in particular on whether the investigatory commission formally finds a collision as the most likely cause.***

- Russian officials who claim that a foreign submarine was involved have been careful to characterize the incident as unintentional, ***suggesting that Moscow would seek to compartmentalize this event from the broader relationship***—as was the case in previous US-Russian submarine collisions in the Barents Sea in 1992 and 1993.

- ***The impact from the other direction—foreign leaders' views of Putin and their policies toward Russia—is likely to be more significant, especially to the extent that they judge that the collision claim is purely for internal propaganda.***

- ***Claims by senior officials already have engendered Western suspicions and distrust that could complicate and hinder future efforts to resolve bilateral problems*** [redacted] (b)(3)

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*** Document 5 of 25 for FBS5 ***
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SUBJ RUSSIA: TAKE 1 OF 2--Kursk May Have Been Attacked by 'Two Foreign Submarines,' Says Moscow Paper

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TEXT P 1

[Article by Yuriy Kochergin, Aleksandr Morozov, and Viktor Sokirko: "Last Battle in Barents Sea? Squadron Bends But Does Not Yield..."]
[FBIS Translated Text] As of today there are more than enough theories about the disaster to the multirole nuclear submarine Kursk: from a collision with a World War II mine to poor crew training. The former is put forward by official Russian representatives, the latter by Americans. People have even gone so far as to say that the submarine might have been attacked by...a UFO!

Moskovskiy Komsomolets is publishing another theory which, let us be frank, is equally fantastic. At least three sources agree on the sequence of events discussed below. Thus, in high-ranking circles it was hinted to us, under strict secrecy, that the possibility is not ruled out that the Kursk was attacked by...two foreign submarines and sunk by a powerful MS-48 torpedo.

This information, let us say at once, is absolutely without any documentary confirmation and could be interpreted as just the usual rumors. All the same, we felt we had no right to let it pass unnoticed.

...Spotting the emergence of a large squadron from the Severomorsk base was not so very difficult, and as a consequence two unidentified submarines were hanging around in the region of the large-scale Northern Fleet exercises from the very first day of the maneuvers. That is the established procedure: NATO submarines have been sitting right on the tail of Russian submarines on patrol duty ever since Cold War times. They also track all more or less significant naval exercises, admittedly from a safe distance. The Russian seamen knew very well that there were now two Los Angeles-class US submarines close by. They say that at first they did not get in the way of the progress of the exercises at all -- they kept their distance: After all, the Russian fleet was carrying out live missile launches at training targets.

Then, it is conjectured, the situation changed: The foreign submarines came practically right up to our squadron. In general, according to all the written and unwritten rules, during exercises of this kind any unidentified target that does not respond to signals and questioning is destroyed -- that is a security requirement.

The forces of the Northern Fleet, still according to conjecture, made several threatening maneuvers to drive the persistent submarines further away from the area of the exercises. At first they did not venture to take extreme measures. Not for the time being.

It is not ruled out that on the approach to Severomorsk the nuclear submarine Kursk was ordered to drive away the uninvited guests. The submarine went onto an attack course.

Let us turn to foreign sources. "Two US submarines and the surface reconnaissance ship the Loyal were observing the maneuvers involving the Kursk," a US intelligence spokesman announced in an official press statement. "Contact with the Kursk was lost soon after the US tracking ships intercepted a twice-repeated request from on board the Kursk to fire two torpedoes. After that there was a big explosion, recorded by US reconnaissance ships."

Could it be that the commanding officer of the Kursk, Captain First Rank Gennadiy Lyachin, had one of the enemy boats in his sights (to all appearances, he did not detect the second)? Who knows? Maybe a request to fire torpedoes was submitted to the command. It seems that he received the command, only not to fire for effect, but as a warning -- a double shot across the bow and stern of the enemy submarine to show that they were not joking. Let us remind you that all this is only at the level of

conjecture. According to this scenario, the enemy fixed the launch and fired a return salvo which the Kursk managed to dodge with an antitorpedo maneuver. Our submarine soared up from a depth of 80 meters to 30 and prepared to surface -- the raised antennas on the sail indicate this. And then the most unexpected thing may have happened: The Kursk was hit during the countermove by a torpedo from the second submarine (the one it had not noticed). This time the Russian submarine did not manage to dodge...

An interesting fact: A few days after this, as one of our sources informed us, a certain Western special service carried out satellite photography of the Kursk lying on the bottom of the Barents Sea. The conclusion of the foreign experts was this: The nature of the damage to the boat and its position on the sea bed are consistent with...a torpedo hit in close fighting by a ship at a distance of 20-25 cables (about 4,500 meters).

However, if you believe all of this and think that the foreign experts correctly analyzed the situation that led to the sinking of the Kursk, it remains unclear why our submarine did not report the underwater battle by radio.

...The other day Putin and Clinton had an unplanned 25-minute telephone conversation the details of which are being kept secret.

P.S. At the Navy Main Staff press service we were informed that among the official theories that exist at present, only the hypothesis of a collision between the Russian submarine and a foreign submarine is being considered. The theory about damage to the hull of the nuclear submarine Kursk by a live torpedo or
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